

ABSTRACT OF THE DISCLOSURE

Various methods and systems for auctioning mutually exclusive items such as golf tee times, restaurant reservations, concert tickets or hotel reservations are disclosed. Mutually exclusive can refer to items that cannot be possessed simultaneously because of physical limitations or to multiple items that could be simultaneously physically possessed but the bidder would only want possession of, at most, one of the items. An electronic auction method therefore performs the following operations: (1) an ordered processing of ranked bids to compare currently active bids with current winning bids to determine the new winning bids; (2) notifying unsuccessful bidders via e-mail to increase their bids; (3) comparing the new bid amount to all outstanding active and winning bids if the unsuccessful active bid is increased; (4) designating the active bid an inactive bid and designating the next highest ranked bid as the user's current active bid if the unsuccessful bid is not increased in the allotted time; and, (5) continuing the protocol until all bidders either have a winning bid or no remaining active bids. An auction system includes a Central Auction Controller (CAC) that allows sellers to list items for auction and users to enter bids and rank orderings. The CAC maintains a central database comprising a database of user information, a database of items and bids and a database of vendor information. Administration of the system is accomplished via an I/O device and CPU and an optional e-mail processor allows automated messaging to users. This methodology allows users to effectively bid on a large number of mutually exclusive items but receive at most one item at the end of the auction. This method has the favorable effects for the users of: (1) increasing the probability of successfully bidding for at least one item; (2) making the auction process more convenient by greatly reducing the need for actively monitoring the auction; and, (3) decreasing the possibility a user will be out bid at the last moment and receive no item. This method has the favorable effects for the seller of increasing the probability their listed items will sell and increasing the expected average sales price.